

Summary

The Problem:

Michigan's veterans are not receiving their benefits in a timely manner. Currently, 66 percent of VA disability compensation claims are backlogged (over 125 days old). In the Detroit Regional VA Office, which processes disability claims for Michigan veterans, the average time it takes to complete a claim is 15 to 18 months.¹ Dr. Benishek believes we can do better than this. As a doctor for 20 years at the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center in Iron Mountain, Dr. Benishek has an intimate awareness of the VA health system and is committed to making it work better for all of our nation's heroes.

The Solution:

■ Making A Seamless Transition...

Dr. Benishek believes that soldiers leaving the military must have a seamless transition into the VA system. To achieve this, Dr. Benishek wants to see better education of soldiers' on their benefits, the VA to have immediate access to soldiers' medical records, and veterans be automatically enrolled in the VA medical system upon leaving the military.

■ Simplifying and Streamlining...

Dr. Benishek believes we can streamline the process by adopting 21st Century solutions. As long as a disability claim has been filed with the help of a certified Veteran Service Officer, and the evidence is determined to be adequate, the VA should immediately disburse benefits for simple disabilities, while continuing to develop the rest of the claim that may require additional evidence.

■ Improving Access for Our Veterans...

As a VA doctor for two decades, Dr. Benishek believes solving the backlog is all about improving access for our veterans. A veteran should be able to navigate the VA system in the least burdensome manner. Since the majority of backlogged claims are appeals, appeals hearings via video conferencing should be expanded. Throughout the claims process, the veteran should be able to check the status of his claim electronically.

¹ Source: U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs, <http://www.vba.va.gov/REPORTS/mmwr/index.asp>